

From: Todd Harrell
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/27/02 10:03pm
Subject: Consumer Concerns about MS Settlement...

Dear DOJ,

My name is Todd Harrell and I wish to submit my comments regarding the MicroSoft case.

Let me preface my comments by pointing out that I have used personal computers since 1983. I have used several platforms and today use a combination of both Windows and Apple based systems. I do not wish to engage in a platform war, each OS has its advantages and disadvantages. My concern is for the future of software development as it relates to my home use, and business use.

It is my belief that the intense competition within the software industry is the reason software has evolved at such a rapid pace. It is my opinion that the business practices of Microsoft threaten the entire industry. Let me point out that while Microsoft holds a monopoly on Operating Systems, I do not feel that this in itself is wrong. If a product gains dominant market share based on its own merits, I support its position. What concerns me is the predatory lengths that MS has gone through to protect its monopoly.

1.) Innovation: One way I believe MS threatens innovation is with its selective targeting of competition.

Example 1: For several years, I used a presentation package known as Aldus Persuasion. Compared with Powerpoint, Persuasion seemed to have a much more robust set of features. Best of all, Aldus corporation aggressively developed this package and each new release had a wealth of new tools and features. In my opinion, Powerpoint was simply an inferior program. It appears that Microsoft simply gave Powerpoint away, and by bundling it with its Office suite, it gained a much higher distribution. While Persuasion was a far superior program with a promising future, it could not compete with MS's predatory practices. Persuasion was finally discontinued. Not only did the loss of Persuasion limit my choice, it cost me financially because I had to adopt Powerpoint as a presentation package.

Since the death of Persuasion, Powerpoint has all but stopped evolving. I use a lot of software (including Powerpoint) and I am used to seeing new features as software is upgraded. Unfortunately, without competition, Microsoft has no reason to develop Powerpoint any further. While most other software continually grows, Powerpoint is essentially unchanged from the versions I purchased 5-6 years ago. Powerpoint is a very crude package with limited functionality. It has certainly not evolved at a rate consistent with most professional software.

Example 2: Word vs. Word Perfect. While the focus of my work doesn't require much word processing, I have used (I currently have licenses of) both products. Simply put, I find WordPerfect easier to use. WP also seems to have a reputation of simply being a better package. As with Persuasion, WordPerfect has all but disappeared in the wake of Microsoft's marketing practices.

2.) Choice: It is my belief that as a consumer and business owner, Microsoft has unfairly limited my choices of software (beyond issues as listed above)

Example 1: For years, I have used Netscape Navigator. Upon the initial release of Explorer, I tried MS's browser for possible use as my primary browser. I simply did not like Explorer, and continued to use Netscape (NN). It seems that in recent years, as Explorer gained market share, NN began having compatibility problems with certain web sites. While I certainly have no proof, I am concerned that perhaps MS's server software or marketing practices have purposely sought to ensure that MS controlled sites or ISP's intentionally "break" with browsers other than IE.

Example2: Ease of use. While I use both Windows and Macintosh, this past year I have used mostly the Windows OS (because of certain software requirements). In my opinion, windows is a more difficult OS to use and maintain. For many network administrators, windows offers a deep, flexible perating system that gives them a lot of technical control. For most of us users though, it is needlesly complex, and arguably obsolete. The Macintosh is strong in the educational community because of its ease of use. School systems can't afford all the network personel required to maintain a PC network. Under the current "proposed" settlement, schools will be forced to accept old computers and a Windows standard. Kids will be raised in an environment where only one OS exists. I doubt most school systems will be able to maintain an efficient network based soley on Windows with out spending lots more for the additional support requirements.

I guess I can go on and on. If you recieve this email and wish for me to contribute further, I will list more of the concerns I have.

Innovation is everything in this industry. If Microsoft is allowed to continue its practices, otherwise progressive companies will have no incentive to innovate and the entire industry will stagnate. Consumers will be hurt as software stops evolving and MS is allowed to raise prices, restrict use and control an industry and technology founded on innovation. Microsoft is not ethical or responsible with its monopoly. They have hurt the OS market, they are hurting the handheld market and now they are moving into the gaming industry. What's next?

Simply put, I am a consumer, I want choices, I expect innovation.
Microft's practice continues to threaten both.

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